



(S//SI) Dispatch from NIST Baghdad: Life in the Palace

FROM: [REDACTED]
NIST Coalition Provisional Authority - Baghdad
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(U) Greetings from Baghdad!

(S//SI) The NSA contingent at the NIST (National Intelligence Support Team)-- based in a former presidential palace in Baghdad-- provides one-stop-shopping for members of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) who look to current intelligence from NSAW as they try to understand the situation here on the ground in Iraq. As it stands now, the majority of intelligence briefed to Ambassador Bremer and the senior staff is SIGINT. In addition to providing the senior staff with our insights into the political and military reporting, we have created topic-driven folders with relevant SIGINT. They have proved so popular that the CIA officer in the NIST is now adding his product to the folders. All of this would not be possible without the support of the deployed assets of AS24 who make sure that we have comms 99.3% of the time! A truly team effort getting information to the customer, whether it's in the palace or back home. All fit into 18-20 hours covered by two people.

(TS//SI) Team Baghdad is more than just the NSA staff at NIST CPA. NSA support extends to 5th Corps, the self-proclaimed CSG Baghdad, Task Force-20, HVT (High Value Targets), SCS (Special Collection Service), and Musketeer. While we try to maintain an awareness of issues that involve all of us, we also get together for a weekly meeting out at Baghdad International Airport (BIAP). It also has proven to be a useful tool to speak with one voice about concerns to NSAW.

(S) You may think from the postcards at the Al Rashid Hotel that we are at vacation central. We are not. When going off the palace compound we all wear body armor and carry a Baretta and/or a rifle. When we travel to BIAP for our weekly meeting, we go out fully armed and in a convoy of two vehicles. Since this is known as the "world's most dangerous road" we try to spend as little time on it as possible. That means not staying in the same place for any period of time and pushing our Chevy Suburban to 110 mph.

(S) As far as living goes, the palace grounds have become a self-contained American city. We live in a trailer park in the back of the palace, which we share with a former US Ambassador and a retired British officer from SIS. The trailer has two rooms with a bathroom in the middle. Three hot meals are available everyday of the week. Some think the meals are horrible but when you have to feed 3,000 people three times a day the level of culinary excellence will suffer. Where else can you relive your elementary school cafeteria? The bad news is that we suffer a little more intestinal discomfort then we did as youngsters.

(S//SI) All in all, it's a once in a lifetime experience. Where else can you play whiffle ball to the sound of gunfire in the distance? Where else can you see that on a daily basis SIGINT is doing its job to provide US civilian and military leadership the information they need to do their jobs? Not many places.

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